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SUBJECT: THE LIVNI CAMPAIGN MANTRA: CLEAN GOVERNMENT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: FM Tzipi Livni launched her public campaign for the leadership of the Kadima Party in June - well before the Kadima Council formally decided in July to hold primaries in September. Livni's consistent campaign message to the Kadima electorate has been a call for a clean slate of leaders to restore public faith in government. Her mantra and its implied criticism of the prime minister have irritated Olmert, whose standing continues to slip in the polls (despite his efforts to discredit his accusers). Livni's attempt to portray her style of politics as more capable and clean has also resulted in closer scrutiny of her own actions, and reporters scrutinized her decision to fly home alone from Paris on a taxpayer-funded business-class ticket rather than share a seat on Olmert's airplane. The tight Kadima primary race with Minister of Transportation Shaul Mofaz, who also claims to be clean, may force Livni to take political considerations into account while she continues her negotiations with the Palestinians. Livni reportedly told Kadima audiences that she is against prematurely codifying the results of her negotiations for fear of revealing concessions that might weaken her in the race against Mofaz. End Summary.

A FALSE START MAKES LIVNI CAUTIOUS

¶2. (U) Just over a year ago, in the wake of the Winograd Commission's Interim Report on the conduct of the Second Lebanon War, FM Livni issued a very public call for PM Olmert's resignation. When Olmert ignored Livni's call and remained in office, she drew much criticism for what came to be known as her "U-turn-decision" to remain in Olmert's government. Since that May 2007 news conference, Livni has exercised caution, never mentioning Olmert by name in any of her repeated attacks on the quality or style of his leadership while intensifying her advocacy of a change at the helm of both party and nation.

LIVNI'S CALL FOR A CLEAN POLITICS

¶3. (SBU) A year after her May 2007 miscalculation, at a conference on homeland security in Jerusalem, Livni unveiled her current political strategy: Shift the focus away from the Prime Minister and the imbroglios in which he is involved and place it on the needs of the party and the people. Speaking shortly after Defense Minister Barak's call for Kadima leadership primaries, Livni seized the occasion to declare: "It is not possible to ignore the events of the last few days. This is not just a matter of whether it is a legal or criminal issue, nor is it only a personal affair concerning the Prime Minister. It concerns questions of values and of the norms we wish to instill and their effect on public trust in politics in Israel."

MOFAZ RETORTS THAT HE ISN'T CROOKED

¶4. (U) In June, FM Livni began to address a much broader electorate than the limited Kadima membership which will have the right to vote for party leader. "When the public gives its mandate," Livni told a

Conference for Quality of Government, "it wants to know that it can trust its chosen leaders and not that those in power are weighing their own future rather than the future of the citizens of Israel." She added that: "A society that considers anything that is not criminal to be tolerable is a society without norms and values. I can't believe that Israeli society is an immoral society. The norms are a tool in the hands of the public, whose chosen leaders are supposed to pay a price or be rewarded." Livni's chief rival, Minister of Transportation Shaul Mofaz, also claims to be as clean as Livni, and recently quipped to a Ma'ariv reporter: "And what I am, crooked?"

IF ELECTED: LIVNI'S MANIFESTO

15. (U) Livni's themes include honesty, reliability and dedication to a higher cause than self-interest. She unveiled her most direct formulation of this theme at a Tel Aviv University conference on June 22 on "Israel: State of the Nation," in which she reviewed sixty years of Israel's relations with the international community before turning to politics: "If you grab the first person you see passing on the street and ask them how they would describe the state of the nation in one word -- they will say "bad" -- and in two words "very bad". If the collective sense is one of public loss of faith in its elected officials, and a feeling that systems are breaking down and that there is no one who may be relied upon, then the road from here to anarchy in which everyone does what they consider to be right... is very short."

16. (U) Livni's campaign mantra broadened, in this forum, from the theme of ethics in public life to larger issues of national purpose

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and commitment: "The first thing a politician must do when elected, is to return the faith to the public... get to know his office... and try and create reforms if change is needed." Livni diagnosed a root cause of the Israeli "malaise": the incessant distraction caused by the "Internet era" in which "Headlines change from second to second...and the message changes every minute." "We need" she said "to restore the common denominator -- that writing on the wall -- and that requires political and diplomatic decisions by the leadership, which almost always involves a choice in which the short-term and long-term cost and goal are in conflict with one another."

PURELY POLITICS

17. (U) Livni's public appearances have not been limited to devotees of government reform and clean government, though she has turned up the volume on her refrain. At a July conference on democracy at the President's residence, she reportedly stated that "from the criminal aspect, a person who breaks the law pays with his freedom; from the normative aspect, this man must pay with his office," according to the Jerusalem Post. She has rolled up her sleeves and begun to actively recruit Kadima Party members around the country, in an effort stay ahead of Mofaz and the other Kadima candidates. She has relied heavily on her deputy minister of foreign affairs, Majalli Whbee, to recruit Druze voters to the party, and used the occasion of a farewell event at Whbee's home in Beit Jann in honor of Ambassador Jones to emphasize her long history of cooperation and support for the Druze community in Israel.

18. (SBU) Comment: Livni's role in negotiations with the Palestinians since Annapolis has mostly been out of the public eye. Should Olmert press for a more public debate about these negotiations, it could put Livni at a disadvantage vis-a-vis her chief rival, Mofaz. A recent Jerusalem Post article noted that Kadima officials speculate that Livni has been adamant about not drafting any agreement with the Palestinians (before Kadima primaries in September) for fear that the concessions in such a document might cost her critical political support.

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